

Bad idea for Supreme Court, bad behavior by legislator

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While district voting of state Supreme Court judges is the correct route, one idea that takes us in the wrong direction is a legislative proposal to require justices to declare a party affiliation when they run for election. It appears to be prompted by the court's 2012 McCleary decision, which ruled the state wasn't living up to its paramount duty of adequately funding K-12 education. Last year, the justices held the Legislature in contempt of court for falling behind its funding timeline. Legislators accuse the court of overreach, while justices say they are simply holding lawmakers to an education plan that they approved.

The state and nation already have witnessed the impact of polarized political parties who vote with an eye on their narrow party political bases, who increasingly do not reflect the views of the bulk of voters. Justices must be free to consider the application of the law, not a litmus test. One of the sponsors called it more of a "poke" than a serious proposal, but it's a poke that makes its proponents look petty.

And while we're on pettiness, consider the antic of 13th District Rep. Matt Manweller, who gathered attention for an act of uncivil disobedience last week when the Supreme Court justices entered the state House chambers to hear Gov. Jay Inslee's State of the State address. As his colleagues stood and politely applauded, Manweller — alone among legislators — sat silently and looked the other direction. "I'm not going to stand in respect for a group of judges who have done so much damage to the Constitution they are supposed to defend," Manweller told a Seattle Times reporter.

A second-term legislator and political science professor at Central Washington University, Manweller is free to disagree with any court ruling for whatever reason. But Manweller's petulant pout puts him at odds with the citizenry's call for cooperation and civility in addressing our problems — of which school funding is a major one. It also erodes his credibility as a serious legislator who is seeking solutions.

Manweller may rationalize his stunt as standing up for his beliefs, but his is an act of pique, not principle, that disrespects our rule of law — by, of all people, a lawmaker.

- Members of the Yakima Herald-Republic editorial board are Sharon J. Prill, Bob Crider, Frank Purdy and Karen Troianello.